

Joe Frazier, Senior, Millard North High School

Joe Frazier of Millard North has had a strong senior season after recording one of the finest final three-week periods of the 2016 track season. After running several 1600 races between 4:39 and 4:45 in the first six weeks of the 2016 season, he lowered his PR to 4:37 on May 4, to 4:35 on May 11, and to 4:26 on May 21, which was good for 7th place at the Class A State meet. Joe has continued to post strong marks in 2017, establishing new PRs in the three distance events on March 17, April 1, April 7 and April 14. His PRs prior to the Districts are 1:59.8, 4:20.8 and 9:28.7. The 2017 results reflect that he hasn't been pushed in either of his 3200 races, so he could see some great improvements in his PR in the next two weeks.

Joe first began running in 7th grade track but didn't find immediate success. The only junior high race he can remember was an 800 when he ran 3:12. He didn't run cross country as a freshman, and he only raced 400s and 800s during the track season, posting bests of 59.5 and 2:25.0. He ran cross country as a sophomore, and he improved his times to 2:05.9 and 4:49 during track season. At the end of the track season, he realized that he could actually be good at running if he ran consistently throughout the year – in short, he would get out of running what he put into it.

When asked for five words to describe himself, Joe and his father responded with 'motivated, running nerd, focused, confident and quiet.' Distance coach Waltz Mertz joked that he didn't know that Joe could talk until Joe's junior year. During our brief interview, it was clear that Joe is an introspective young man who is focused on excellence in all parts of his life. When asked what motivates him to train hard every day, he quickly responded: "Hirsch, Greder, Slagle, Arno, Ralston, and all the other great Nebraska distance runners."

Joe plans to study physics at Nebraska Wesleyan this fall – where he'll run for Coach Ted Bulling and alongside sister Anna, who has focused primarily on the 400 during her first two years at NWU – and he's applied this same scientific rigor to his running career. In addition to cross-training through biking, lifting and swimming (which he just added this past-off season), Joe and Coach Mertz both use the resource 'Computerized Running Training Programs,' a 1972 book by J. Gerry Purdy and James Gardner, as a training guide.

The Millard North program is a relatively low-mileage program, with Joe running about 25-30 miles/week during the season. He has a tendency to overtrain, which led to an injury last summer. Consequently, Coach Mertz feels his biggest challenges are to keep Joe healthy while finding workouts that improve his fitness level.

With just a few weeks left in his high school career, Joe's only regret is that he didn't seriously commit to the sport until late in his sophomore season. He still has several goals to achieve, though, including to place at State in the 1600 and 3200 and to break Brian Turner's school record of 9:25. Turner was a high school All-American who also set the Nebraska high school record of 1:50.82 (and the second best 1600 of 4:10.8), so breaking Turner's 3200 record would be a monumental accomplishment for Joe.

Jay Slagle is a volunteer writer for the Nebraska Elite TC website. The father of three teenagers, including a Creighton Prep runner, Jay is a self-professed running nerd who was never good at running.

He has written two children's books available for sale on Amazon. Visit www.jayslagle.com for more information.